



Micheli WWGA Answers

The following questions were submitted to the five candidates attending the WWGA/WSFW Gubernatorial Candidates Forum. Ron Micheli's responses to the WWGA questions are found below:

Is the current system and process of how Wyoming manages its state lands, particularly as regards the grazing of livestock, fair, equitable and appropriate? What changes, if any, would you as Governor want to make in this regard?

Yes, I believe the current system is appropriate. I am a staunch supporter of agricultural leases of state lands. Private agricultural leases of state land not only support a critical component of our economy and way of life in Wyoming, but they also provide a means of oversight and stewardship for those state lands, thus saving the state precious resources.

The Legislature has worked very hard over the past several years, including two legislatively created State Lands Task Forces since the 1990's, which have studied in depth how Wyoming manages its state school trust lands. The Legislature has done a good job of balancing the returns from grazing while at the same time taking into account the stewardship of those lands provided by the lessee's. The School Trust Account continues to accumulate and derive revenue which in turn is distributed out to our schools. Additionally, we have managed to keep family livestock operators on the lands for the long term.

Saying that, we must always be mindful we have a very fluid and dynamic situation on our state lands with new opportunities and challenges. It is one of the Governor's duties to continually watch, listen and carefully take into consideration all of these changes and circumstances while always caring and providing for the long-term health and sustainability of those lands.

Do we need any changes in how Wyoming manages our Water and particularly changes to our water statutes?

It is well recognized that Wyoming, through our prior appropriation and preferential right system, has the best framework for protecting, managing and deriving benefit from water, particularly in a semi-arid climate. We MUST protect that at ALL costs!

There are areas, however, in which I am interested in continuing a dialog to hear more about ideas that have been brought forward which could provide holders of water rights additional opportunities for revenue from that water right while at the same time providing additional benefits to our state and our citizens. We live in a part of our country and our world where water is a limited resource and that will only become more so.

At the same time, Wyoming's prior appropriation and preferential rights system has been the major force that has allowed our ancestors, and now us, to transform what was essentially a high altitude desert into a tremendously productive and bountiful state which supports our agriculture community, our cities and towns, and most importantly our wildlife resource. You cannot be from agriculture and not know the precious value of water to our state, and it will always be one of my top priorities as Governor.

While running for office, the current Governor promised to significantly increase the number of water storage projects across the state. This has not occurred. As Governor, what is your view as to water storage and what direction would you take us?

We need to actively and aggressively look for every opportunity that we can find to store, develop and utilize our water here in Wyoming. As a headwaters state, every state below us wants and needs our water. If we are not diligently working to develop and store that water, we will always face the possibility of someone challenging us for it and possibly losing it. We can't let that happen!

Water is the lifeblood of Wyoming and storage of undeveloped water is a critical safeguard for Wyoming's advancement and prosperity. As Governor, I will actively support, and initiate, water projects that will serve the long-term interests of our citizens, our industries, and our wildlife resources.

In recent years, the Legislature has increased the level of general funds going to the Wyoming Livestock Board. Would you say that level is too high, about right, or too low?

I support the current level of state funding going to the Livestock Board. The Livestock Board is a unique partnership between the state and the end-users of the services provided by it. Through our brand inspection program, the Wyoming

livestock industry pays in millions of dollars to the program as payment of services the Livestock Board provides to the industry.

At the same time, the Livestock Board provides a tremendous level of services and activities that have direct and measurable benefit to the general public of Wyoming. Whether it be in the form of disease monitoring and surveillance, to actively monitoring and safeguarding animal welfare in Wyoming, the Livestock Board has a number of statutorily defined responsibilities' and duties that it must perform. I am comfortable with providing general fund support for those activities that have direct benefit to the public, while at the same time recouping those costs that are required to provide services to the livestock industry.

The issue of animal welfare has been brought to the forefront across the nation in the past several years. Where does Wyoming stand in terms of animal welfare and what, if any, statutory changes would you seek to our animal welfare statutes?

Animal welfare is a hot button issue within our country right now. Americans have a distinct and different relationship with the animals we care for than most other countries of the world. We place tremendous value on animals in our society, whether it be for companionship or whether it be as part of a business enterprise. That being said, I want to be particularly clear on one crucial point.

Animals are property, and as such in my mind they should always be treated legally and statutorily in that regard. Whether it be companion animals or pets which are the property of the owner, or livestock which are the property of a rancher or farmer, or wildlife, which is property of the State, animals belong to someone or something. As such, I do not support the notion that they have "rights" like unto an individual.

As a fourth generation rancher who has spent a great deal of my life actively caring for and nurturing all of the animals we have been blessed in owning, I strongly believe that every "owner" has both a legal, as well as a moral, responsibility to care for those animals to the best of their abilities which results in that animal being provided those elements in which it needs to adequately and appropriately survive and flourish. It is also reasonable that the State, through the Legislature, has an obligation and responsibility to set up minimum levels of care that a domestic animal needs and then an obligation to step in if those are not met.

For the most part, we in Wyoming have done a good job of taking care of our animals, and we can and do step in from time to time when it is necessary. I support the current efforts of the Livestock Board, which has authority over all domestic, non-wildlife animals, in examining our current statutory framework for the welfare of those animals over which it has authority, and will listen carefully

when that process is completed. We have shown since statehood that we in Wyoming, working together, have the ability to come up with practical, common-sense, workable and appropriate solutions to challenges, and I am confident that we will do the same with this issue.

The University of Wyoming is ostensibly a "land grant university". Can you explain in your own view what that means and is the University meeting that definition and responsibility?

In order to understand the significance and importance of the term "land grant university", it is important to understand their history. The land grant university system was created by passage of the Morrill Act by Congress in 1862, which was designed to fund educational institutions by granting certain federally controlled lands to the states for the states to then develop, or sell, to raise funds to establish and endow "land grant" colleges. The mission of these institutions, as set forth in the 1862 Act, is "to focus on the teaching of agriculture, science and engineering as a response to the industrial revolution and changing social class rather than higher education's historic core of classical studies." Each state was originally eligible for only one land grant university, although that number has been expanded to include other entities and institutions such as the territories and tribal entities. The mission of the land-grant universities was expanded by the Hatch Act of 1887, which provided federal funds to states to establish a series of agricultural experiment stations under the direction of each state's land-grant college. The outreach mission of the land-grants was further expanded in 1914 by the Smith-Lever Act which created the cooperative extension service, whose original mission was to send "agents" into rural areas to help bring the results of agricultural research to farmers and ranchers.

Obviously, in the 148 years since the Morrill Act was passed, land-grant university's have evolved and adapted to meet the ever increasing needs and demands of society. I believe, however, that the underlying and foundational mandates remain, and all land-grant universities have a duty and responsibility to meet those basic and fundamental responsibilities and commitments that were made when the state accepted the land grants and agreed to develop a land grant institution in their state. That responsibility and commitment remains with the University of Wyoming.

In terms of whether or not UW is currently meeting those responsibilities, I believe under the current direction and leadership of Dr. Tom Buchanan UW has made great strides and progress in re-establishing it's land-grant foundation and base. The University cannot be "all things to all people", and Dr. Buchanan has re-established UW priorities and is well on its way to becoming the pre-eminent land

grant University in the country. Obviously, much depends upon funding, and the Legislature has provided tremendous resources to UW to continue to excel.

Wyoming agriculture must now compete on a global level with our agriculture products. Are we competing on a "level playing field" and if not, what can the Governor of Wyoming do to "level it out"?

No, Wyoming agriculture does not compete on a "level playing field", and that is almost exclusively due to actions of Congress and mis-guided administrations. For example, the Wyoming sheep industry competes everyday with product from foreign sources. One of their major competitors is lamb from New Zealand. New Zealand has a national prohibition against the importation of any animal into their country that may prey on sheep. Here in Wyoming, our own federal government forced the 8th major predator of sheep onto the industry in the form of introduced, non-native Canadian grey wolves. Another example, the use of Compound 1080, a highly selective and cost-effective chemical which controlled ever-widening and burgeoning populations of coyotes that cause significant damage in Wyoming. The federal government banned most of the uses of Compound 1080 in the United States in 1972, but it is widely used in other countries, including Australia where the Australian government provides it free of charge to livestock producers. There are numerous other examples of actions by the federal government that have placed agricultural producers at a disadvantage to their counterparts in other countries.

As Governor, I will work with other like-minded states to do everything in our power to protect our basic industries from further federal intrusion and disastrous policies. If necessary, we will take the federal government to court. Additionally, I strongly support and will continue to advocate for a strong Department of Agriculture and Agri-Business Division of the Business Council, which have done tremendous work in protecting and enhancing Wyoming agriculture with the resources they were given. Within the limits of our financial wherewithal, and using zero-based budgeting, under my administration Wyoming will continue to support and protect our agriculture industries and the state agencies mandated to serve them

How can we facilitate better relationships between landowners and the Wyoming Game and Fish?

The Governor has a direct and pivotal role in enhancing and bettering the relationship between the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and landowners

who provide much of the critical and crucial habitat for our wildlife. It starts with appointments to the Game and Fish Commission. I will appoint individuals who have proven themselves to be willing to work for the betterment of both the wildlife and landowners of our state. There will be no “activists” with their own political or philosophical agendas appointed to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission under my administration. This applies to either side of the political spectrum.

Secondly, we need to seriously look at surrounding states and examine their programs which have had success in enhancing wildlife, access for hunting and fishing, public use and incentivizing landowners. Programs such as Colorado’s “Ranching for Wildlife” and Utah’s “Cooperative Wildlife Management Unit program”, and even their “Rural Roadsides for Wildlife Program”, can provide Wyoming ideas and guidance as to what works and what doesn’t in terms of strengthening partnerships between state game agencies and private landowners.

Thirdly, there will be no initiatives brought forward under my administration that are done in the “dark of night” without input and involvement of those most directly affected by the decisions made. While it may have brought forward some good ideas, many landowners have expressed to me their frustration and disillusionment about the way in which the Sage Grouse Core Area program was developed and implemented. Many have told me that they feel as if they were disenfranchised and had no input into how the decisions were made as to where the lines were drawn for the Core Areas.

Under the Micheli Administration, ALL affected parties will be brought in early and will have ample opportunity to have input. Now I’m not suggesting everyone will receive their desired outcome, but I can commit that they will walk away knowing their views were heard and their input was valued.

Another area in which I wish to have a dialog and some good discussion is on the Wildlife Trust Fund. I support the WTF, and I think there has been some good work done through it. I am concerned however about where some of the funds are being directed. When the legislation which created the WTF was debated, there was much discussion and some concern expressed by many members of the Legislature about the use of WTF monies to purchase conservation easements. Now, I support conservation easements in certain circumstances, they have their place. However, I am not sure the Legislature intended for as much money to have been spent for conservation easements as has been. I think we need to seriously look at this, and if needed we should readjust our priorities to make sure that we are getting the most “bang for our buck” in terms of “on-the-ground” investments that truly benefit wildlife and the landowners who support them on their land.